

The Man *of* Romans 7



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 7.*

Memory Text: “Now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (*Romans 7:6*).

Few chapters in the Bible have created more controversy than has Romans 7. Concerning the issues involved, *The SDA Bible Commentary* says, “The meaning of vs. 14–25 has been one of the most discussed problems in the whole epistle. The main questions have been as to whether the description of such intense moral struggle could be autobiographical, and, if so, whether the passage refers to Paul’s experience before or after his conversion. That Paul is speaking of his own personal struggle with sin seems apparent from the simplest meaning of his words (cf. vs. 7–11; [Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 19; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 475]). It is surely also true that he is describing a conflict that is more or less experienced by every soul confronted by and awakened to the spiritual claims of God’s holy law.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 553.

Bible students differ on whether Romans 7 was Paul’s experience before or after conversion. Whatever position one takes, what’s important is that Jesus’ righteousness covers us and that in His righteousness we stand perfect before God, who promises to sanctify us, to give us victory over sin, and to conform us to “the image of his Son” (*Rom. 8:29*). These are the crucial points for us to know and experience as we seek to spread “the everlasting gospel” to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6*).

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 21.*

Bound to the Law?

Read Romans 7:1–6. What illustration does Paul use here in order to show his readers their relationship to the law, and what point is he making with that illustration?

Paul’s illustration in Romans 7:1–6 is somewhat involved, but a careful analysis of the passage will help us to follow his reasoning.

In the overall context of the letter, Paul was dealing with the system of worship established at Sinai; that is often what he means by the word *law*. The Jews had difficulty grasping the fact that this system, given to them of God, should end with the coming of the Messiah. This is what Paul was dealing with—Jewish believers still not ready to abandon what had been such an important part of their lives.

In essence, Paul’s illustration is as follows: a woman is married to a man. The law binds her to him as long as he lives. During his lifetime she cannot consort with other men. But when he dies, she is free from the law that bound her to him (*vs.* 3).

How does Paul apply the illustration of the law of marriage to the system of Judaism? *Rom.* 7:4, 5.

As the death of her husband delivers the woman from the law of her husband, so the death of the old life in the flesh, through Jesus Christ, delivers the Jews from the law they had been expected to keep until the Messiah fulfilled its types.

Now the Jews were free to “remarry.” They were invited to marry the risen Messiah and thus bring forth fruit to God. This illustration was one more device Paul used to convince the Jews that they were now free to abandon the ancient system.

Again, given all else that Paul and the Bible say about obedience to the Ten Commandments, it doesn’t make sense to assert here that Paul was telling these Jewish believers that the Ten Commandments were no longer binding. Those who use these texts to try to make that point—that the moral law was done away with—really don’t want to make that point, anyway; what they really want to say is that only the seventh-day Sabbath is gone, not the rest of the law. To read these verses as teaching that the fourth commandment has been abolished or superceded or replaced with Sunday is to give them a meaning that the words were never intended to have.

Is the Law Sin?

If Paul is talking about the whole law system at Sinai, what about Romans 7:7, in which he specifically mentions one of the Ten Commandments? Doesn't that refute the position, taken yesterday, that Paul was not talking about the abolition of the Ten Commandments?

The answer is No. We must keep in mind, again, that the word *law* for Paul is the *whole* system introduced at Sinai, which included the moral law but wasn't limited to it. Hence, Paul could quote from it, as well as from any other section of the whole Jewish economy, in order to make his points. However, when the system passed away at the death of Christ, that didn't include the moral law, which had existed even before Sinai and exists after Calvary, as well.

Read Romans 7:8–11. What is Paul saying here about the relationship between the law and sin?

God revealed Himself to the Jews, telling them in detail what was right and what was wrong in moral, civil, ceremonial, and health matters. He also explained the penalties for violation of the various laws. Violation of the revealed will of God is here defined as sin.

Thus, Paul explains, he would not have known if it was a sin to covet without having been informed of that fact by the “law.” Because sin is the violation of the revealed will of God, where the revealed will is unknown, there is no awareness of sin. When that revealed will is made known to a person, he or she comes to recognize that he or she is a sinner and is under condemnation and death. In this sense, the person dies.

In Paul's line of argument here and throughout this section, he is trying to build a bridge to lead the Jews—who revere the “law”—to see Christ as its fulfillment. He is showing that the law was necessary but that its function was limited. The law was meant to show the need of salvation; it never was meant to be the means of obtaining that salvation.

“The apostle Paul, in relating his experience, presents an important truth concerning the work to be wrought in conversion. He says, ‘I was alive without the law once’—he felt no condemnation; ‘but when the commandment came,’ when the law of God was urged upon his conscience, ‘sin revived, and I died.’ Then he saw himself a sinner, condemned by the divine law. Mark, it was Paul, and not the law, that died.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1076.

In what sense have you “died” before the law? How, in that context, can you understand what Jesus has done for you by giving you a new life in Him?

The Holy Law

Read Romans 7:12. How do we understand this text in the context of what Paul has been discussing?

Because the Jews revered the law, Paul exalts it in every way possible. The law is good for what it does, but it can't do what it was never meant to do, to save us from sin. For that we need Jesus, because the law—whether the entire Jewish system or the moral law in particular—cannot bring salvation. Only Jesus and His righteousness, which comes to us by faith, can.

Whom does Paul blame for his condition of “death,” and what does he exonerate? Why is that distinction important? *Rom. 7:13.*

In this verse, Paul is presenting the “law” in the best sense possible. He chooses to blame sin, not the law, for his terrible sinful condition; that is, his working “all manner of concupiscence [lust]” (*vs. 8*). The law is good, for it is God's standard of conduct, but as a sinner, Paul stood condemned before it.

Why was sin so successful in showing up Paul as a terrible sinner? *Rom. 7:14, 15.*

Carnal means “fleshy.” Thus, Paul needed Jesus Christ. Only Jesus Christ could take away the condemnation (*Rom. 8:1*). Only Jesus Christ could free him from slavery to sin.

Paul describes himself as “sold under sin.” He is a slave to sin. He has no freedom. He can't do what he wants to do. He tries to do what the good law tells him to do, but sin won't let him.

By this illustration, Paul was trying to show the Jews the need of the Messiah. He already had pointed out that victory is possible only under grace (*Rom 6:14*). This same thought is reemphasized in Romans 7. Living under the “law” means enslavement to sin, a merciless master.

What has been your own experience with how sin enslaves? Have you ever tried to play with sin, thinking you could control it as you wished, only to find yourself under a vicious and merciless taskmaster? Welcome to reality! Why, then, must you surrender to Jesus, and die to self daily?

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“If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom. 7:16, 17). What struggle is presented in these verses?

Using the law as a mirror, the Holy Spirit convicts a person that he or she is displeasing God by not fulfilling the requirements of the law. Through efforts to meet those requirements, the sinner shows that he or she agrees that the law is good.

What points that Paul had already made did he repeat for emphasis?
Rom. 7:18–20.

To impress upon a person his or her need of Christ, the Holy Spirit often leads the person through an “old covenant” type of experience. Ellen G. White describes Israel’s experience as follows: “The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God’s law; and they readily entered into covenant with God. Feeling that they were able to establish their own righteousness, they declared, ‘All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.’ Exodus 24:7. . . . Only a few weeks passed before they broke their covenant with God, and bowed down to worship a graven image. They could not hope for the favor of God through a covenant which they had broken; and now, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of the Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371, 372.

Unfortunately, by failing to renew their dedication to Christ daily, many Christians are, in effect, serving sin, however loathe they may be to admit it. They rationalize that, in reality, they are undergoing the normal experience of sanctification and that they simply still have a long way to go. Thus, instead of taking known sins to Christ and asking Him for victory over them, they hide behind Romans 7, which tells them, they think, that it is impossible to do right. In reality, this chapter is saying that it is impossible to do right when a person is enslaved to sin, but victory is possible in Jesus Christ.

Are you having the victories over self and sin that Christ promises us? If not, why not? What wrong choices are you, and you alone, making?

Delivered From Death

Read Romans 7:21–23. How have you experienced this same struggle in your own life, even as a Christian?

In this passage, Paul equates the law in his members (his body) with the law of sin. “With the flesh,” Paul says, he served “the law of sin” (*Rom. 7:25*). But serving sin and obeying its law means death (*see vs. 10, 11, 13*). Hence, his body—as it was now functioning in obedience to sin—fittingly could be described as “the body of this death.”

The law of the mind is God’s law, God’s revelation of His will. Under conviction of the Holy Spirit, Paul consented to this law. His mind resolved to keep it, but when he tried, he couldn’t, because his body wanted to sin. Who hasn’t felt that same struggle? In your mind you know what you want to do, but your flesh clamors for something else.

How can we be rescued from this difficult situation we find ourselves in? *Rom. 7:24, 25*.

Some have wondered why, after reaching the glorious climax in the expression “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord,” Paul should refer once more to the struggles of the soul from which he apparently had been delivered. Some understand the expression of thanksgiving as a parenthetical exclamation. They believe that such an exclamation follows naturally the cry, “Who shall deliver?” They hold that before proceeding with an extended discussion of the glorious deliverance (*Romans 8*) Paul summarizes what he has said in the preceding verses and confesses once again to the conflict against the forces of sin.

Others suggest that by “I myself,” Paul means, “left to myself, leaving Christ out of the picture.” However these verses are understood, one point should remain clear: left to ourselves, without Christ, we are helpless against sin. With Christ we have a new life in Him, one in which—though self will constantly arise—the promises of victory are ours if we choose to claim them. Just as no one can breathe for you or cough for you or sneeze for you, no one can choose for you to surrender to Christ. You alone can make that choice. There’s no other way to attain for yourself the victories that are promised us in Jesus.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Perfect Law,” pp. 212–215; “A Divine Sin Bearer,” pp. 308–310, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “Healing of the Soul,” pp. 84, 85; “The Importance of Seeking True Knowledge,” pp. 452–454, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Christ’s Victory as Complete as Adam’s Failure,” p. 323, in *My Life Today*.

“There is no safety nor repose nor justification in transgression of the law. Man cannot hope to stand innocent before God, and at peace with Him through the merits of Christ, while he continues in sin.”
—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 213.

“Paul desires his brethren to see that the great glory of a sin-pardoning Saviour gave significance to the entire Jewish economy. He desired them to see also that when Christ came to the world, and died as man’s sacrifice, type met antitype.

“After Christ died on the cross as a sin offering the ceremonial law could have no force. Yet it was connected with the moral law, and was glorious. The whole bore the stamp of divinity, and expressed the holiness, justice, and righteousness of God. And if the ministration of the dispensation to be done away was glorious, how much more must the reality be glorious, when Christ was revealed, giving His life-giving, sanctifying, Spirit to all who believe?”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1095.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Who do you think the man of Romans 7 is? Paul, before or after conversion? Or is this chapter talking about something else entirely? What justification do you have for your answer? In class discuss the answers given.
- 2 How do we explain the fact that even baptized, born-again Christians struggle with sin? Shouldn’t we automatically overcome everything? Or will we always be sinning? Or is the answer somewhere in between?
- 3 What potential dangers arise from the view that, as Christians, we will always be sinning, always be falling, always be violating God’s law, no matter what? On the other hand, what potential dangers arise from the view that as Christians we must overcome every wrong thing in our lives, every wrong thought, every wrong tendency—no matter what, or else we are not saved?
- 4 In the end, regardless of whatever position folk take on the man of Romans 7, what promises can we take from Romans 7 for ourselves that will help us understand what it means to be followers of Jesus?

New Life, New Hope

by RICHARD LACROIX

I was in and out of prison so many times, most often for drug-related crimes. I even gave my life to Jesus and was baptized there. When I was released, I was full of hope for a new life, but I couldn't find work and became discouraged. I ended up back in prison again.

I was released again, and early on Sabbath morning a man shook me awake saying, "Brother Barker [the prison ministries leader] sent me to fetch you to church—now!" I got up and went to church with him.

This man took me to a Seventh-day Adventist church founded by the prison ministries team. It was the grand opening day, and what a joyful day it was! I returned home filled with joy, only to face reality. I was an addict, and I had no strength of my own to quit. I had bought drugs with money that church members gave me for food! I couldn't face these people.

I was lost in drugs. But one day God said to me, "Do you want this? Or do you want a better life?" I asked God to do whatever it took to clean me up. So when I was arrested and sent to prison again, I actually thanked the judge.

The day after I arrived in prison I told cellmates that I didn't want to see any drugs or know of any drugs. Not even cigarettes.

I went to the church in prison, where Brother Barker led out. We studied and prayed together, and I recommitted myself to Christ. I asked forgiveness for all the wrong things I had done and prayed for my family and friends I had wronged. Although I was in prison, I was free!

God strengthened me with His Word, and I began working with others who were bound by chains of sin and addiction. Every day I committed myself to God, for I knew I couldn't do it alone.

When I was discharged I went to the New Hope Prison Ministries Adventist Church and found a welcome from others who knew the struggles I faced. The church members helped me find a job and get settled into a new life. The devil still pressures me with temptations and distractions, but God sustains me.

I asked for deliverance from drugs, and God gave me so much more. He's given me a new life, new work, and new joy.

Your mission offerings help fund the prison ministries program in Trinidad. And that program helped me find victory in Jesus. Thank you.

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